

How to Start an Online Program

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*i*NACOL 
International Association for K-12 Online Learning













How to Start an Online Program: A Practical Guide to Key Issues and Policies

Site Resources

Community Resources

Consulting Resources

MAIN SECTIONS

	Home		Admin Systems
	Getting Started		Curriculum
	Funding		Teachers
	Policies		Students
	Budget/Staffing		Quality



Your Guide to K-12 Online Learning

Starting an online program is a daunting task which often can be overwhelming. If you have come to this web site, you probably already know this. The information and resources provided here have been compiled and organized to help you feel less overwhelmed.

The majority of content on this site is intended for program administrators — the people that are either investigating the possibility of creating an online program or have already been assigned this task. The site also contains useful information for policy makers — state legislators, staff members at the state department of education, and district administrators who wish to establish a positive policy environment for online learning.



Project Team

- Matthew Wicks – [iNACOL](#)
- David Glick – [David B. Glick & Associates](#)
- Rob Darrow – [Clovis Online School](#)
- Lisa Gillis – [Insight Schools](#)
- Liz Glowa – [Glowa Consulting](#)
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- Caterina Trimm – [Catholic Schools K12 Online](#)

Other Small Group Leaders

- Debi Crabtree – Hamilton County Virtual School
- Stephanie Dunbar – Mercury Online
- Amy Murin – Evergreen Education Group
- Bryan Setser – North Carolina Virtual Public School
- Tom Stanley – Project Learning Corp

Who Are You?

- Status of your program
 - 48%: 1. We are in the discussion stages of starting an online program
 - 27%: 2. We are actively in the process of starting an online program
 - 6%: 3. Our online program has just launched
 - 12%: 4. We have been running our program for about a year
 - 6%: 5. We have been running our program for more than a year

Who Are You?

- Experience in Online Learning
 - 30%: Just getting started (all with programs that are being discussed or actively being created)
 - 24%: 1 year
 - 9%: 2 years
 - 12%: 3 years
 - 6%: 4 years
 - 18%: 5 or more years

Who Are You?

- Type of Program
 - 67%: Blended Program
 - 73%: Supplemental Program
 - 48%: Full-time Program
 - 54%: District-based program
 - 42% Enroll students only from your district
 - 12% Enroll students from multiple districts
 - 18%: Charter School
 - 15%: Enroll students from most or all of the state













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TOPICS in this section

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Getting Started

Overview

To get your program development off to a solid start, you and your team will need to make numerous fundamental decisions. These initial decisions provide the framework on which you will design your program ensuring that it meets your particular needs, priorities and resource availability.

The following topics discuss those decisions that need to be made towards the very beginning of the process of starting your online program:

Nature of the Organization: Online learning programs vary greatly. There is no single *right* way to design an online program. Although all programs try to provide educational opportunities that were previously unavailable, the specific reasons for creating programs, the target











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TOPICS in this section

▶ Nature of the Organization

- Purpose and Audience
- Market Analysis
- Program Types
- Mission
- Challenges

Start-Up Funding

Stakeholders

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Nature of the Organization

Online learning programs vary greatly. There is no single **right** way to design an online program. Although all programs try to provide educational opportunities that were previously unavailable, the specific reasons for creating programs, the target audiences, the goals and the barriers can take many different forms. This topic helps you in determining the defining characteristics of your online program.

Purpose and Audience: There are many reasons to create an online program and many types of students that can benefit from such programs. Understanding how and why your organization determined the program's and the specific students you'll target is critical to its ultimate success. [...more info](#)

Market Analysis: As you begin to better understand your purpose and target audience, it is also important to understand the market demand and how you will compete in your online

TOPICS in this section

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Purpose and Audience

There are many reasons for creating an online program, and understanding the reasoning of your organization is critical to the ultimate success of your program. Today's online programs and schools offer a broad range of online courses and services to reach a variety of students, from struggling to gifted, who seek personalized pathways to learning opportunities.¹ Additionally, many schools have reasons for starting an online program related to teacher availability, course variety and finances.

Many educators are finding that online and blended learning are effective ways to reach students who fail one or more courses, become disengaged, or who seek an alternative to traditional education.²

It is helpful to carefully describe your target audience. You probably have a good idea already about simple characteristics like the grade levels you wish to serve. Begin by writing down the student characteristics that you have already considered.

Highlighted Resource

To get more specific, the worksheet, [Online Learning: The Opportunities It Can Provide; the Problems It Can Solve](#) describes a number of more specific purposes and target audiences.³

This worksheet can be used with groups of stakeholders to identify the priorities of each group and your organization as a whole. These discussions will not just identify your target audience and your primary purposes. They may also uncover many assumptions and myths that members of your group may hold.

Site Resources Page

General Resource Pages

While the vast majority of the content on this web site is organized into one of the 10 main sections, occasionally there were subjects that did not clearly fit into a specific category. These pages are referenced from other pages within the site, but are also included here as another way to navigate to these pages:

- [Geographic Considerations](#) – provides questions to consider when your online program may cross, school, district, or state boundaries.
- [Types of Interactivity](#) – provides definitions of the four types of interactivity that occur in online courses.

Useful Documents

[*A National Primer on K-12 Online Learning*](#). This iNACOL publication written by John Watson provides a good overview for people just getting started with online learning.

[*Access and Equity in Online Classes and Virtual Schools*](#). This iNACOL Research Committee Issues Brief written by Ray Rose and Bob Blomeyer provides important information for understanding this important policy area.

[*Blended Learning: The Convergence of Online and Face-To-Face Education*](#). This document from the iNACOL Promising Practices Series written by John Watson and Butch Gemin provides information and examples related to this rapidly growing area of online learning.

[*Examining Communication and Interaction in Online Teaching*](#). The iNACOL Research Committee Issues brief provides information that is helpful for determining student interaction policies.

[*Funding and Policy Frameworks for Online Learning*](#). This document from the iNACOL Promising Practices Series written by John

Glossary

For the most part, the definitions below have been taken from most recent draft of an iNACOL project to provide definitions for a large number of online learning terms. In some cases we found other terms that we thought would benefit from a clear definition and developed our own definition for those items.

Advanced Placement: An Advanced Placement course is a college-level course taught in the high school context following a syllabus aligned with the College Board Advanced Placement test for that course.¹

Agrarian calendar: The traditional school calendar in the United States which was organized around the needs of farmers resulting in school not being in session during the late spring, summer, and early fall.

Asynchronous communication: Communication that is separated by time. Examples are email, online discussion forums, message boards, blogs, podcasts, etc.

At-risk student: A term used in the literature to refer to students who have learning and behavioral disabilities and are unable to cope in the traditional classroom and to students who are lower performing academically.²

Attendance: Number of students actually present in a course or a school.

AUP (Acceptable Use Policy): A policy that outlines the responsibilities of students, teachers, staff, and others as they use the computers, software applications, and Internet when using the school or district computers or Internet connections. AUPs also outline the consequences for failure to adhere to this policy.

Blended course: A course that is offered in a blended format. See [Blended learning](#).

Blended learning: Learning that is facilitated by the effective combination of different modes of delivery, models of teaching and styles of learning, and is based on transparent communication amongst all parties involved with a course.³

BOCES (Board of Cooperative Education Services): An intermediate education agency (IES) that provides school districts with educational services.

Brick and mortar schools: Refers to traditional school or traditional school building, as contrasted with an online school.

Break-Out Session

- Quick introductions around the table
- Discuss the reasons why you are attending the session
- Report the top 3 to the rest of the group

Rest of the Day

- Rotating Small Group Discussions
 - Getting Started, Quality, and Access & Equity
 - Funding and Budget/Staffing
 - Teachers, Students, and Student and Teacher Related Policies
 - Curriculum and Curriculum & Instructions Policies
 - Admin Systems

Schedule

- 10:00 – 10:45 Welcome and Opening Session
- 10:45 – 11:40 Break-out Session 1
- 11:40 – 12:35 Break-out Session 2
- 12:35 – 1:20 Lunch
- 1:20 – 2:15 Break-out Session 3
- 2:15 – 2:45 Snack Break
- 2:45 – 3:40 Break-out Session 4
- 3:40 – 4:35 Break-out Session 5
- 4:35 – 5:00 Closing